DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 280 019 CS 210 284

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TITLE Asking Good Questions, Getting Good Writing. A Teacher's Handbook on Writing across the Curriculum at Minneapolis Community College.
INSTITUTION Minneapolis Community Coll., Minn.
PUB DATE 85
NOTE 104p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Community Colleges; *Content Area Writing; *Grading; Higher Education; *Instructional Development; Instructional Improvement; *Questioning Techniques; Student Motivation; Teaching Methods; *Writing Evaluation; *Writing Exercises; Writing Instruction; Writing Processes
IDENTIFIERS *Writing across the Curriculum

ABSTRACT

The result of the Writing across the Curriculum Project at Minneapolis Community College, this handbook provides teachers with effective, efficient, and practical suggestions for crafting good writing assignments in content area classrooms. In general, the book encourages teachers to ask good questions and to experiment with writing. Respectively, chapters discuss (1) ways in which teachers can save time and energy as they assign and grade writing, along with some examples of writing assignments in which the activity of writing in itself promotes learning; (2) principles to help teachers ask questions that demand thinking, such as deciding the purpose of a particular assignment for students and relating this purpose to them; (3) several nontraditional writing assignments that provide an alternative to term paper assignments; (4) the steps necessary to prepare students to succeed as writers and tips on what kinds of classroom discussion can promote this goal; and (5) ways in which teachers can save time when marking papers, suggesting that teachers consider writing an activity and process of learning rather than a product to be graded. Several extended examples and sample assignments are included, as is an annotated bibliography. (JD)

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Asking Good Questions

Getting Good Writing

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A TEACHER'S HANDBOOK

on

Writing Across the Curriculum

at

MINNEAPOLIS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

ERIK F. STORLIE

and

MARY BARWISE

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Published by Minneapolis Community College

with funding from a Title III Grant

and from Minneapolis Community College

A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

Over the last two years more than half the faculty at Minneapolis Community College reexamined the quality of the writing assignments they ask of students. That "re-vision" process throughout the curriculum was made possible by a Title III grant and an unswerving commitment to the value of writing in the process of learning by Dean of Instruction Walter Cullen. This handbook is manifestation of that commitment and the faculty's work.

The teachers whose assignments lace this handbook consulted with Professor William E. Coles, Jr., University of Pittsburgh. Their collaboration on each assignment reflects renewed dedication to engaging the student's mind actively in the learning process by asking good questions.

Having been raked over the coals along with our colleagues, we prepared this handbook to share the most effective, efficient, and practical suggestions we've discovered for crafting good writing assignments. This is neither a philosophical nor theoretical treatise. It is designed to give busy faculty ways to use writing assignments more productively and to do so without draining more time and energy from the teacher.

In the handbook's preparation our friends came forth. Foremost is Ruby Hesterberg, our stalwart ally on the word processor throughout preparation and "repairation" of this manuscript. With its completion she now may be able to enjoy Saturdays and holidays without our cluttering her dining room and life. Title III's Director, Maureen Moo-Dodge, and Walter Cullen fearlessly took administrative risk to make this possible.

Their leadership was bolstered by advice from Professor Chris Anson, from the English Department at the University of Minnesota; by patient repair of the word processor from Everett Tollerud, our computer whiz; by on-the-spot grammatical advice from Carol Brambl; and by attentive proofreading from Bonnie Wiger, Paul Hesterberg, Jeanne Cipar, and Frances and Hjalmar Storlie. Indebted as we are to the good work of these friends and colleagues, we accept responsibility for all sins of omission and commission as we salute those who tried to help us avoid both.

Erik Storlie Mary Barwise

November 1985

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PREFACE

To speak these days of the importance of Writing Across the Curriculum to education is a bit like speaking of the importance of diet and exercise to good health: all of us know that all of us know what all of us know--for what good any of that ever did anybody. It is the step from passive acknowledgement to active commitment that makes the difference between being sick and being well--just as this handbook represents the difference between education understood as an abstraction and education as an activity. Education as an activity is not something one reads about only or contemplates just. It is an idea in motion, something people are doing.

The doing at Minneapolis Community College with Writing Across the Curriculum is considerable--and I say this out of a lot more than casual awareness of what has been done (and what hasn't) with Writing Across the Curriculum at other colleges and universities in the United States.

I am speaking of more now than the efforts of Professors Barwise and Storlie in putting this handbook together. And I am speaking of more also than what the various members of the Minnesota Community College faculty have offered as examples to illustrate their use of writing in the classroom. I am speaking rather of what these things in aggregate may be said to mean about your institution, about a whole that from the point of view of an outsider is a good deal larger than the sum of its parts.

It is this. "At the utmost," Henry Adams writes at the end of his Education,

> the active-minded man should ask of his teacher only mastery of his tools. The young man himself, the subject of education, is a certain form of energy; the object to be gained is economy of his force; the training is partly the direct application of effort. Once acquired, the tools and models may be thrown away.

As consultant to the Writing Across the Curriculum project that has begun at Minneapolis Community College, I functioned, in Henry Adams' sense, as a kind of teacher, as a supplier of tools. What I see in the creation of this handbook, in how it was conceived and worked on particularly, is what I would call the beginning of an economy of force. It is a privilege to have worked with those who were good enough to have submitted writing assignments for this handbook--and who responded, to a person, so receptively and graciously to the suggestions of an outsider. It is a privilege to have been chosen to be someone who may now be thrown away in order that you be able to refine what you will need to keep.

William E. Coles, Jr.

October 14, 1985

Chapter One

ASSIGNING WRITING: GETTING MORE FROM STUDENTS AT LESS COST TO TEACHERS

"Writing Across the Curriculum used to be called Education."

Ann Berthoff

The emphasis in this handbook is on experiment. We cannot tell you exactly how you might assign more writing to students more effectively in your discipline at an acceptable cost in time. But we can offer some hints that may smooth the path, some general principles, and over twenty writing assignments that faculty here at Minneapolis Community College chose to fine tune and polish over the last year with the help of William E. Coles, Jr, a Professor of English and expert consultant on writing from the University of Pittsburgh.

These well-designed assignments are, we think, the strongest encouragement we can offer our faculty to experiment with writing. They range from very short assignments of only a sentence or two to lengthy case studies, from informal pieces designed to provoke class discussion to formal summations of a quarter's work in a take-home final. We present these, not as models for you to imitate, but as possibilities to examine, hoping that this handbook might suggest to each of you some exciting possibilities for experimenting with writing in your classroom. We don't wish to tell faculty they ought to do something or how to do something. Rather we offer here some laboratory results--some experiments with writing our colleagues have made, and some notes of our own on what they might mean. These records of others' experiments may encourage you to make further experiments of your own.

WHAT IS "WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM"?

"Writing Across the Curriculum" is the term for various ways of putting writing back into as many classrooms as possible. Some schools are beginning to do this by pairing an English teacher with a history or science or other non-English teacher to work on a major paper. Other schools require for graduation a number of courses which demand extensive writing in various disciplines. With funds made available through a Bush Foundation grant, Minnesota Community College faculty will be supported in their efforts to assign more writing to students by conferences, workshops, and organized groups of interested faculty on each campus. Behind all this is what Professor James L. Kinneavy calls "a resurrected sense of the responsibility of entire faculties and administrative bodies for the literary competency of the graduates of our high schools and colleges" (see Bibliography). Or as Dean of Instruction Walter Cullen put it, "Until students are writing widely in their classes, Minneapolis Community College fails to employ fully a most valuable resource--students' minds."

BUT ISN'T TEACHING WRITING THE JOB OF FRESHMAN ENGLISH TEACHERS?

Teaching writing is, certainly. How to make a cogent argument or express a view clearly, how to use evidence to support a conclusion, how to develop an idea: these are the goals of writing courses and the reasons freshman English is still a requirement at Minneapolis Community College. But insisting that students <u>use</u> these skills and refusing to accept writing that suggests bad thinking is no more the sole concern of freshman English teachers than students' ability to add and subtract is the sole concern of mathematics teachers. A student can't become a good writer in your discipline by taking nine credits of freshman English, just as she can't learn the mathematics she needs for a physics class by taking nine credits of arithmetic. The goal of Writing Across the Curriculum is to encourage the activity of writing in <u>every</u> classroom--not just because students "ought" to know how to write, but because the thought processes essential for good writing are central to every discipline and every educational enterprise.

I CAN'T KEEP UP WITH MY WORKLOAD AS IT IS. HOW CAN I POSSIBLY ASSIGN STUDENTS MORE WRITING?

We will spare you high-minded exhortations to be more dedicated, to work harder, to spend more evenings and weekends grading papers. We know very well that in community colleges, teachers teach fifteen hours each week and often have three or more preparations. Few of you can afford to add to your workload, and if this handbook fails to suggest intriguing possibilities for saving yourself time as you use and grade writing, we think you should throw it away.

In fact, we will try to demonstrate that assigning writing can save you time in the long run by enabling you to teach more effectively. We will present writing as an activity which can promote learning, as a teaching tool which makes you more effective by helping students become teachers of themselves. We will show you writing tasks which students cannot perform without having, through the act of writing itself, learned something. And we will describe techniques to handle quickly and responsibly the paper load these assignments generate.

CAN YOU GIVE ME ANY REASON TO BELIEVE THAT USING WRITING ACTUALLY PROMOTES LEARNING?

There is extensive literature suggesting that the activity of writing can promote learning (the items listed in the Bibliography are a beginning), but from our point of view, the primary value of such research is that it validates something most teachers already have an intuitive sense of. In explaining why she demands that students in her statistics course explain in writing every numerical manipulation they make, Professor Casey Humphreys went to the heart of the matter in saying: "If they can't explain what they've done, then they really don't understand what they've done. And giving them a chance to explain in writing gives them a chance to understand." Humphreys asks her students the kinds of questions that demand more than memorization. Of course, retention and recall are essential to the learning process, but a primary focus upon them, as in the multiple-choice or short-answer test, cannot force comprehension upon students as does Humphreys' demand that

they explain every mathematical manipulation they make in English. Humphreys' student teaches herself by coming to know <u>how</u> she knows <u>what</u> she knows. (See the Index for the pages on which Humphreys' and others' assignments appear.) Writing assignments of this kind promote thinking and learning by demanding that students first present information relevant to a problem, and then apply it in such a way as to provide a solution. Engaged in this activity of writing, the student makes "writing" decisions which are simultaneously decisions about how ideas in a discipline connect. Once committed in writing, she can examine and revise each sequence of thought, teaching herself by generating and refining her own ideas.

CAN YOU GIVE ME SOME EXAMPLES OF WRITING ASSIGNMENTS IN WHICH THE ACTIVITY OF WRITING IN ITSELF PROMOTES LEARNING?

While the move from recall of relevant information to integration of that information into a unified whole asks for sophisticated thinking, assignments demanding it can be very short--a single sentence or paragraph. Consider what Professor Richard Koplitz asks of students in these five brief questions.

* * * *

Crisis of Civil Liberties Political Science 101

There are two kinds of questions to answer on this quiz. Questions one and two test your ability to retain and recall the material of the filmstrip. Questions three, four, and five ask you to take a position on matters that the filmstrip presents. Each question is worth two points.

1. According to Filmstrip Two, what are civil liberties?

2. According to Filmstrip Two, why was there a "row kicked up all over the world on Sacco and Vanzetti"?

3. Do you believe the Alien and Sedition Acts were unconstitutional? Why?

4. How would you have voted in the United States Senate on the motion to condemn Senator Joseph R. McCarthy for conduct unbecoming a senator? Explain your reasoning.

5. Was it right for Daniel Ellsberg and Anthony J. Russo, Jr., to release the Pentagon Papers to the press? Was it right for the newspaper to publish them? Explain your reasoning.

* * * *

At first glance, this assignment might appear to be a quiz. But notice how the questions move from demanding recall of information about <u>what</u> the filmstrip presents (one and two) to demanding integration of that information in questions such as what is the <u>meaning</u> of constitutionality in relation to the Alien and Sedition Acts (three, four, and five). In a few sentences a student begins to work out her application of a difficult political concept in a specific historical framework. She cannot do this assignment without beginning to <u>generate</u> ideas in the discipline.

Here is another short writing assignment asking for the recall of relevant information and its integration into a specific context--this one developed by Professor Scott Davis for his pharmacology course.

* * * *

Chemical Dependency

You are working as the educational director in a dual disability clinic. One of the patients has been placed on parnate, an MAO inhibitor. She asks you to explain:

1. Why she has been given the drug.

2. What the drug does exactly and how it does it.

3. What results she may expect.

Answer this patient's questions briefly, but fully, in a single well-developed paragraph. Remember, you are the educational director in this clinic, not a medical doctor, but not just a friend either. Your responsibility is to educate--decently, conversationally, but as accurately as you can.

* * * *

Students must both present and integrate information about patient diagnosis, drug effect, and the patient's subjective experience of the drug, while speaking as they would were they in a professional counseling situation. In the activity of writing this assignment--an exploration of ways to tell an institutionalized patient accurately and compassionately about a drug she is taking--students must begin to teach themselves what chemical dependency counseling really involves.

THESE MAY BE GOOD SHORT WRITING ASSIGNMENTS. BUT I'M STILL GOING TO HAVE TO READ AND MARK ANY PAPERS I ASSIGN ONE BY ONE. HOW CAN THIS POSSIBLY SAVE ME TIME?

We feel it is imperative that you be able to use writing in your classroom at no additional costs in time to you over the long run. To prepare to do this, we recommend two things.

First, develop clearly focused and brief writing assignments which ask real questions, that is, questions which require students to generate and integrate ideas, as seen in the two assignments just presented. The more sharply defined and provocative your assignments, the more students can do with them in a short space and the more easily, quickly, and fairly you can grade the papers that come in. Chapters Two, Three, and Four will elaborate on this theme.

Second, develop effective techniques for handling papers, avoiding the pitfalls of "traditional" paper grading. This handbook does <u>not</u> recommend that teachers red pencil spelling and grammar or rewrite sentences and reorganize paragraphs for students. The value of such practices even in composition courses is being sharply questioned, for most students don't learn from them and repeat the same errors on the next paper. And most teachers, discouraged and frustrated by such results, will avoid assigning writing.

We will devote Chapter Five entirely to a variety of techniques by which you can mark papers quickly and responsibly. But let us begin here with a few immediately useful ideas. Non-English faculty are uneasy, of course, when handling writing problems, for these fall outside their field of expertise. But you <u>do</u> know, in fact, when a student's English malfunctions, just as you know when your car is running rough or the muffler is noisy. And when you, rather than an English teacher, tell a student that her English fails to communicate, she is far more likely to listen. Nevertheless, it is not your job to fix the problem. Turn the student and her paper over to the English Division or the Learning Assistance Center. Your proper concern is dealing with your discipline. Nonetheless you can and should demand that discipline content be presented in college-level English and grade off when it isn't.

When students question your judgment or the appropriateness of losing credit for "English" in an art history or statistics or physics course, explain that compositional accuracy is integral to effective communication of ideas in every discipline. Standard usage in English, like standard weights and measures in science or accurate dates in art history, permits meaningful communication. Tell students this and return for revision

or grade down careless writing. Simple and appropriate comments on English might be: "Work on your English at the Learning Assistance Center." Or "Rewrite a clean, error-free copy, and I'll read this." Or "Bad English is bad history." Or if your syllabus contains some useful language about your expectations for papers, simply: "Fix!"

When you comment on discipline content, we suggest short final comments of 25 words or less. Tell students what they have done well and what they could do to improve their understanding of the issue at hand. As writing is in itself valuable for students, keep them writing more, even if you must comment less. Combining these techniques with various non-traditional writing assignments such as the notebook or the pass/fail five-minute writing--assignments which, if so designed, need little comment and no letter grading at all--can allow any teacher to experiment with writing at an acceptable cost in time.

IS THERE A FORMULA FOR WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM?

None that we know of. In the following chapters you will find numerous writing assignments developed by Minneapolis Community College faculty, but they fit no single mold. We will offer some further ideas on how to experiment with your own assignments, prepare students for them, and mark the papers that come in. If this handbook encourages you to experiment with a writing assignment where there was none before, or gives helpful hints on handling the writing you already assign, or informs you of what other teachers are doing with writing, its purpose is served. We especially encourage you to examine the assignments our colleagues have given us to include here. We are impressed with their work. We think you will be too.

Chapter Two

ASKING QUESTIONS THAT DEMAND THINKING

Socrates used questions to draw his students to knowledge. Again and again he showed them the importance of asking rigorous, penetrating questions of themselves and of the universe, questions which empower learning. The diminution of written dialogue in American education diminishes the entire enterprise. Writing Across the Curriculum is an attempt to return faculty and students to that dialogue which is at the root of the Western tradition.

WHAT KINDS OF QUESTIONS CAN EMPOWER STUDENTS TO LEARN?

Start with your own experience as a student, as an answerer of questions. What worked best? We certainly know what didn't work--vague, lengthy, infrequent, overwhelming questions. They did not empower us to search for meaning and coherence: "Write a paper on civil liberties." "Discuss _____." "Take a position for or against _____." We learned how to survive such desultory tasks, but they taught us far less than they could.

Fortunately, there were other kinds of questions--questions that demanded specific intellectual action: "Decide," "Defend," "Explain," "Find." At the time we may have hated them, for they blocked cliche, fuzziness, and bombast. But we can now see why those questions mattered, that to work with them seriously is

to begin to gain control of our studies and perhaps even of ourselves.

In setting writing problems for students, many teachers instinctively reach for the interesting, personal, and controversial. Such subjects as abortion, free trade, the freedom of the press, the Arab-Israeli conflict, civil liberties, and so on are given students again and again. These are fruitful and engaging subjects for students to declare themselves on <u>if</u> you set up your questions in such a way as to head off automatic or thoughtless responses. Professor Mary Pruitt moves students in her women's studies course past the dangers of mindless praise with this assignment.

* * * *

Heritage of American Women

> The Women's Hall of Fame in Seneca Falls, New York, is soliciting nominations for their July 1982 Honors Ceremony. They will choose to "honor in perpetuity those women, citizens of the United States of America, whose contributions to the arts, athletics, business, education, government, the humanities, philanthropy and science, have been of greatest value for the development of their country." Imagine that any one of the women whose life and works we have studied in this course were to be nominated by any one of the other women we have studied in this course. Explain in as much detail as you can why the woman you have selected to do the nominating would nominate the woman you think she would.
>
> Write a final paragraph in which you explain whether you agree or disagree with this nomination and why.

* * * *

Similarly, Professor Larry Litecky guides his American studies students away from cliches about "Where the World is Headed" and "What it All Means" by demanding that they earn the right to predict and condemn.

* * * *

First Paper Assignment American Studies 115

Imagine that you are a 27-year-old woman or man attending a family gathering and talking with both a parent and a grandparent. They tell you that American moral values and people have certainly changed (they say "deteriorated") compared to what they were earlier this century. They want to know how all this happened? What does it mean that it happened? And, above all, what can the individual do about it?

Drawing upon John Naisbett's Megatrends, material covered in class, and from your own experience, write a paper in which you address these questions.

Begin your paper by using the concepts of future shock and megatrends to try to explain how values and people may be said to have changed and what these changes are.

How may these changes be said to have affected and influenced people's lifestyles and values, their relationships and ideas of family?

Explain how you see the effects of future shock and megatrends as positive, and how you see them as negative.

Finally, what can an individual do about future shock and megatrends? Make clear what makes you say so.

* * * *

In both assignments questions that could have permitted some kind of party line have been posed so as to guarantee that students, if they are to address the assignments at all, will have to think, to gather and sift evidence, and then integrate it into sophisticated responses to specific questions.

CAN YOU GIVE ME ANY PRINCIPLES I MIGHT USE TO DESIGN WRITING ASSIGNMENTS FOR MYSELF THAT CONTAIN WHAT YOU CALL GOOD QUESTIONS?

Rather then coming up with a long list of guidelines for constructing effective writing assignments, we'd like to talk about five general principles we think important --illustrating each one with assignments developed by members of our faculty.

Principle 1

DECIDE FIRST OF ALL EXACTLY WHAT YOU WANT A PARTICULAR WRITING ASSIGNMENT TO DO FOR YOUR STUDENTS.

This is less simplistic than it sounds. While at times you have only a single thing you want students to grasp through their writing, at other times you will pose them problems of great complexity. What you are after will make a great difference in format, length, the types of questions you use, and so on.

If, for example, you simply want to know whether your students are doing outside reading, it is enough to assign summaries or to devise a set of questions, the answers to which students will find only in their reading of particular texts. Here a simple multiple-choice test may be your best instrument. If you are training students to record data objectively, your questions will make clear that you as, say, a nursing instructor do not want students to write in a shift report that a patient was "angry and depressed." Rather than giving an interpretation of behavior, they should note that the patient threw a glass of water on the floor and cried for two hours.

A more complex demand is that students be thinkers, evaluators, makers of patterns and orderers of worlds. The struggle to master (however imperfectly) a sophisticated question can have an enormous payoff in student learning. Teachers can ask students, for example, to apply what they learn in the classroom to the world outside, as does Professor Casey Humphreys in the following assignment from a formal statistics notebook.

* * * *

Bivariate Data

Select a population from which you can obtain two different measures (sets of numbers) which you think it's reasonable to assume may be related. You want to work out what that relationship is. (Example: As people grow taller they usually gain weight).

1. Explain in a short paragraph why you chose the population to study that you did. What kind of relationship do you expect will exist between the two measures you are interested in?

2. Clearly describe your population and the two characteristics you will be studying. Define which of the two measures you will consider the independent variable and which the dependent variable. Explain why you defined each variable as you did.

3. Write a short paragraph describing your sampling plan. How have you insured that your sample is random?

4. Collect 15 to 20 ordered pairs of data. List the data in (x,y) form.

5. Construct a scatter diagram for your data. Be sure to include title, axes, labels, etc.)

6. Next, prepare a table to assist in the organization of your data. Calculate the extensions x, xy, and y and the summations of x, y, x^2, xy and y^2.

7. Use this table to calculate the linear correlation coefficient r. Explain what this value means and how it is important to your project.

8. Using r, calculate the equation for the line of best fit. Draw the line on your scatter diagram and label all significant points.

9. Explain the significance of the line of best fit. What does the value of the slope represent? What does the value of the y intercept represent?

10. Write a short concluding paragraph in which you do two things:

    a. Describe the relationship between the results you expected from your study and the results you obtained.

    b. Describe a follow-up study that would help either confirm or deny the results you obtained.

* * * *

Students are forced by this assignment to separate into parts what they have been learning, and then select intelligently those parts they will need to reassemble into a response. Using the text any student could calculate the linear correlation coefficient r to answer number seven, but Professor Humphreys insists they understand what they are doing well enough to identify relevant properties of the correlation and explain its value in another context.

Or a teacher's purpose with an assignment may be to teach students to make a certain <u>use</u> of the data they record. Notice how carefully Professors Nancy Miller and Margaret Trenchard specify what they want from students in this assignment.

* * * *

The Therapeutic Milieu Nursing N201

Directions: 1) Arrange a visit to a setting designed to restore, promote and/or maintain mental health. You are to assess the setting in terms of what you have heard in lecture and read in your assigned readings.

2) Hand in this paper by the assigned date.

3) At the end of the quarter some group time will be devoted to sharing these papers.

<u>Guide</u>

Points:

0 1. Identify the site you have chosen to assess.

5 2. Identify the goals and philosophy of this particular setting.

5 3. Describe this setting. Is this setting appropriate to meet the goals stated?

5 4. In what ways does this setting support (or not support) the recovery of the client? (What therapies are used, and how well are they administered? What cultural and social factors are made use of in therapeutic treatment?)

5 5. How do staff function in this milieu? Is there a specific role for nursing? Identify the qualifications of the staff.

5 6. How does this therapeutic environment modify the behavior of the client and allow change, learning and maturing? State your answer in terms of the setting's philosophy and goals.

Note: Since care and precision are an important part of nursing, points may be lost in all of the above areas for carelessness in spelling and grammar, poor logic, inaccuracy, etc.

* * * *

The instructors' first purpose here is to hold their nursing students to observing and recording objectively. The second purpose, however, is to invite students to go beyond observation, to evaluate, based on what they have learned in class and from their text, the <u>quality</u> of the milieu they have observed.

Principle 2

EXPLAIN TO YOUR STUDENTS IN THE ASSIGNMENT ITSELF HOW ACCOMPLISHING A PARTICULAR WRITING TASK IS IMPORTANT TO THEM.

Students are motivated by questions whose answers can make a difference in their lives. In another assignment Professors Trenchard and Miller capitalize on the nursing student's need to translate intellectual understanding in the classroom into practical skills she can apply in a mental health setting.

* * * *

Mental Health -- Mental Illness Nursing N201

Directions: 1) With this assignment you will begin shaping your professional ideas about mental health and mental illness based on your current level of knowledge.

2) You will submit this assignment by the date required.

3) Your paper will be reviewed in a final clinical conference to trace any change in your ideas and to identify progress in meeting specific goals as a result of your mental health experiences.

Guide:

Points:

5 1. Define mental health as you understand it. Be sure to explain why you define mental health in the terms you do and not in some other terms.

5 2. Define mental illness as you understand it. Again, be sure to explain why you define mental illness in the terms that you do.

5 3. Given your definition of mental health and mental illness, state your beliefs as to why people become mentally ill.

5 4. Given your definitions of mental health and mental illness, what five strengths do you bring to the mental health nursing experience?

5 5. Identify five characteristics about yourself that you think you have to work on most to become an even more effective nurse in the mental health setting.

5 6. Explain your plan for becoming an effective nurse in the mental health setting.

Note: Since care and precision are an important part of nursing, points may be lost in all of the above areas for carelessness in spelling, grammar, punctuation, poor logic, or lack of clarity.

• • • •

Notice the various ways in which writing this assignment focuses the student on her own professional development, providing her with a chance to examine critically her assumptions about mental health and illness, to revise them as her understanding deepens, and to be prepared to apply her revised understanding to the practice of mental health nursing.

Here is another writing assignment developed by Professor Lorrie Kohler that asks students to make their reading and writing into something more than busywork--in this case into an opportunity to apply knowledge of anatomy to their own personal health.

• • • •

Basic Anatomy and Physiology 125
The "Have a Heart" Assignment

This assignment is designed to encourage you to use resources other than the text and lectures to increase your knowledge and understanding of the heart and circulatory system. You may choose to read a magazine or newspaper article which discusses something related to the heart and is of particular interest to you, e.g., heart disease, nutritional factors affecting heart disease, heart transplants. Or you may attend the Science Museum of Minnesota, 30 East Tenth Street, St. Paul, and view the exhibit entitled, "Mending a Broken Heart." (If you do

not have a membership in the Science Museum, the cost for seeing all exhibits is $3.00 for adults.) Whichever you choose, you are responsible for writing three paragraphs--one on each of the following questions:

Paragraph 1: What in this article/exhibit was of particular interest to you?

Paragraph 2: Cite three examples of things you read/saw which you could relate to concepts you studied in class.

Paragraph 3: Cite one thing you learned from the article/exhibit which you can put to immediate use in your own life. Describe how you will use the information.

Your paper should be no longer than one page and typewritten (if possible). If you choose to review a magazine or newspaper article, include a copy of it with your paragraphs. The assignment is due on _____, and is worth twenty points. It will be evaluated on compositional format and scientific accuracy.

* * * *

Notice how Professor Kohler moves students first to consider what about the material they viewed or read is of special interest to them, then to connect that material to the coursework itself, and finally to describe how they can put their learning to use in their own lives--returning to the student responsibility for her learning and for her health.

Principle 3

PROVIDE IN TERMS OF THE ASSIGNMENT AN AUDIENCE FOR STUDENTS OTHER THAN JUST THE TEACHER.

We're just not audience enough. How stale to write a paper on osmosis for a PH.D. in biology, or a paper about Third World press complaints voiced in the United Nations for an expert on international affairs. It helps students to have a more realistic listener for what they write, one who has something at stake and is listening carefully.

That's what Professor Anita Makar provides. She might have asked students simply to list five social agencies and the services each offers. Rather she strengthens the assignment by adding a hypothetical client.

* * * *

Agency Independent Study Project Human Services 103

PURPOSE: As a human services worker, you will be called upon to refer clients to a variety of agencies and resources. How will you go about deciding the best place to refer your client? What will be some of the criteria you will need to consider in helping you to reach a decision? To send your client to an inappropriate agency may result in inadequate assistance for the problem. Agency selection is, therefore, a task you must consider carefully.

ASSIGNMENT

Select an appropriate referral for a hypothetical "client" having a problem that needs dealing with by an appropriate agency.

1. Begin your paper by describing your hypothetical client and his/her problem. (one page).

2. Select and describe five criteria you will use in choosing an appropriate agency for your client. Indicate why you believe each criterion is important. (i.e., location, program, cost, etc.) (one page)

3. Make contact and collect data from five agencies dealing with the identified problem. (Use at least one agency not in the First Call For Help). You may collect data in a variety of ways: by visiting the agency, making phone calls, sending for brochures, etc.; then establish a rating scale for each criterion you have selected and rate each criterion for each agency selected. You will need to explain your ratings. If, for example, you use a numerical rating, you will have to explain why the agencies differed in the ratings you gave them. (one page)

Summarize your ratings in chart form for ease of comparing the agencies and attach this chart to the last page of your paper.

Example	C-1	C-2	C-3	C-4	C-5	T
Agency 1						
Agency 2						

State a clear conclusion explaining the most appropriate referral for your client based on your research. Indicate what you learned from doing this project. (one page)

4. Conclude your paper by explaining the most appropriate referral for your client based on your research. (one page)

WRITING

Since written documentation is an important part of being a responsible human services worker, your paper should be well written and free of spelling, typing, and grammatical errors. If you don't feel confident about your writing skills or would like some help, you should plan to visit the Learning Assistance Center located on the north end of the skyway that joins the Technical Institute and the Parking Ramp. I would appreciate having this assignment typed, but a clear handwritten paper is acceptable.

DUE

This assignment is due on _____. It will count as 30% of your total grade.

NOTE

Samples of well-done assignments are available for review in my office, C-123.

* * * *

By offering students a hypothetical client, this writing task demands that students think as they must once they are working in the field, responding to someone for whom their advice may be a matter of life or death.

Principle 4

MAKE USE OF THE BASIC PATTERNS OF ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS

If a writing assignment is to help students become teachers of themselves, it must ask questions that go beyond retention and recall. To design such assignments, ask questions that require analysis and synthesis. First, ask students to analyze a problem, to break it down into its component parts and search for information relevant to a solution. Second, ask students to synthesize, to reassemble that material into a coherent whole which offers a solution. In committing themselves in writing to this process, students must generate and evaluate their own ideas in your discipline. They begin to learn how to learn. We see this done in the following assignment developed by Professors Lois Bollman and Mary Parish.

* * * *

How to Study Learning Assistance Center

You are writing a newsletter for your local newpaper urging adults to go to college. Begin by indicating the pitfalls as well as the advantages of returning to school. You could include a personal example, if you like.

Follow this with a list of "ten commandments" of study skills that would make returning to college a more positive experience. State each commandment in a complete sentence. Include a reason why this commandment should be used. Follow this with an example of a situation in which your tip might be particularly helpful.

EXAMPLE OF A COMMANDMENT

TIP	REASON	EXAMPLE
1. Always create a quarterly calendar at the beginning of each quarter so that you can see when you will be busy and when you will have free time.	You might, for instance, discover that during the fifth week of class you will be having three midquarter exams and a report to hand in, but that knowing this at the beginning of the quarter can result in planned preparation as opposed to panic preparation.	

Notice how Professors Bollman and Parish make use of a hypothetical audience to give relevance to this assignment. Students become teachers themselves, offering other adults advice on how to succeed in school. To develop this advice, students first analyze their own experience as learners, an analysis which will suggest some of the pitfalls for an adult student returning to school. Then they integrate this data with what they have learned in the course so as to

originate ten pieces of advice on how to study successfully. Instead of being given a list of good study habits to memorize (and soon forget), students must create their own and teach those habits to an audience for whom they matter.

Here is another use of the pattern of analysis and synthesis in an assignment Professor David Hanson uses at the end of a sequence of compositions in his freshman English class.

* * * *

Freshman Composition

THEME EIGHT: This is the last theme of the quarter and will be written in class during a 110-minute class period.

In a five-page argument, evaluate the improvements you have made in your writing this quarter and discuss how various theme assignments have helped you.

First, evaluate the improvements you see in your writing. Organize your ideas around general areas of improvement such as spelling, mechanics, organization, etc. Use all the themes you have written as evidence for the improvements you see in your writing. Be specific in your reference to themes by taking short quotations from or referring to specific parts of your themes.

Second, decide how helpful various theme assignments have been in the improvments you made this quarter. Did you find that writing out of class caused greater improvment? Did the themes written in class help you? Did ungraded themes help you develop critical skills for your own writing? Did specific themes and topics help you? Again, be specific in your reference to themes as evidence of which types of assignments helped you most.

You don't have to try to answer all the questions I have listed; in fact, the list of questions you ask yourself should come out of your experience in writing. Use the questions here to get started in organizing your ideas.

As you have done in your previous in-class writing assignments, please budget your time carefully. Use the following schedule as a rough guide:

1. Allow twenty minutes for a rough-draft outline and a main-idea sentence.

2. Allow one hour for a rough draft and revision.

3. Allow thirty minutes for the final copy and proofreading.

* * * *

Here Professor Hanson's students must first analyze the various improvements they see in their writing, examining the themes they have written throughout the quarter. Next they determine which particular assignments caused the greatest improvement. In this final paper, the process of writing itself helps students to reflect on their progress as writers.

Principle 5

MAKE USE OF "OPEN" QUESTIONS, THAT IS, QUESTIONS WHICH PERMIT A VARIETY OF LEGITIMATE RESPONSES.

Central to the enterprise of using writing to promote learning is to ask students open questions--questions that invite a number of valid responses. When you want students to demonstrate recall, a quiz does the job most efficiently. But when you want students to write as a way to learn, present them with writing decisions which are also decisions about meaning, about what is the best approach to a problem (as they understand things at that point). Students thereby come to learn, though what they have written may be groping and tentative--even in conventional terms "bad."

Here is a good example of the use of open questions in Professors Renee Tasaka and Jan Swedberg's extended case study of the hypothetical Mr. Harry Stevens, incapacitated by a heart attack after enjoying a covered-dish supper at the Methodist church during his campaign for town councilman.

Nursing 202

A STUDY OF A PATIENT WITH THREATENED OXYGEN NEEDS

The following hypothetical patient situation is a study of threatened oxygen needs. This study follows the patient from his admission through three weeks of hospitalization.

Directions:

1. Read this guide through completely before starting to answer the questions.
2. All answers should be explained in your own words.
3. Write (use a pen) or type your answers in the space provided on this worksheet.
4. The point total for this paper is 90.
5. Late papers will be penalized 5% per day every day they are overdue.

A Patient with Threatened Oxygen Needs

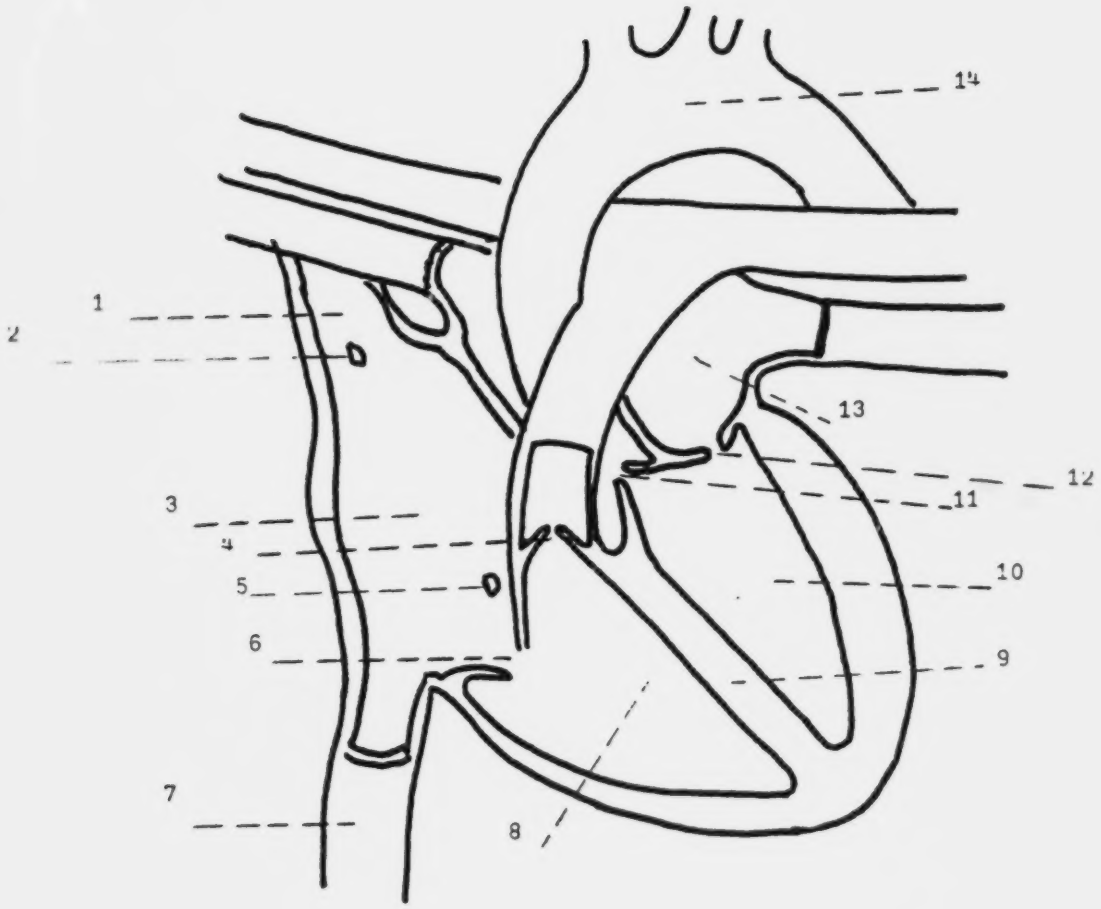
Mr. Harry Stevens, a 48-year-old insurance salesman, is married and has three children: two boys, sixteen and fourteen years old, and a five-year-old daughter. Mrs. Stevens is a registered professional nurse but has never practiced because she and Mr. Stevens were married as soon as she was graduated from nursing school twenty years ago. During the past few years, she has been helping her husband with his insurance work, which has increased tremendously, so much so that Mr. Stevens frequently works twelve to fourteen hours a day seeing clients and keeping his books. He smokes two packs of cigarettes per day.

The Stevens family lives in a comfortable seven-room home, owns a small outboard motor boat, and has two automobiles. Because of Mr. Stevens' insurance affiliation, the family has complete health and hospitalization insurance

coverage, and Mr. Stevens carries a large life insurance policy.

Having been active in politics for the past fifteen years, Mr. Stevens recently ran for town councilman. As election day neared, Mr. and Mrs. Stevens campaigned vigorously, attending rallies, meetings, dinner parties, and numerous meetings of civic groups. One week prior to election day, Mr. Stevens and his wife attended a covered-dish supper at the Methodist church, to which they belong. As he was getting ready to leave, Mr. Stevens suddenly grabbed his wife's arm and said that he had a terrible pain across his chest. He said it was as though there were a metal band being tightened around his chest; that the pain ran down his left arm and up into his neck. He staggered to a chair saying that he felt very faint and dizzy. Mrs. Stevens took his pulse, which she found to be very rapid and weak. She immediately asked someone to drive them to the hospital. He said that the pain was worse, and he couldn't get his breath. He was carried to a car and arrived in the hospital emergency room fifteen minutes later.

At the hospital emergency room, the nurse on duty noted that he was in acute distress; that he was sweating profusely, pale, and complained of being nauseated and not able to get his breath. Oxygen was administered by mask at once, and he was admitted to the coronary care unit. An admitting history and physical examination were omitted; the admitting diagnosis was myocardial infarction.



Review of the Anatomy of the Heart

1-14 Identify each of the above structures of the heart and place the corresponding number in the responses listed below.

____ Left Atrium
____ Right Atrium
____ Left Ventricle
____ Right Ventricle
____ S A Node
____ A V Node
____ Bundle of His
____ Inferior Vena Cava
____ Superior Vena Cava
____ Aorta
____ Pulmonary Valve
____ Tricuspid Valve
____ Aortic Valve
____ Mitral Valve

15-16 What two nerves control the rate and rhythm of the heart?

17-19. What is a myocardial infarction? What other terms (including names by lay persons) are used to describe this condition? What is meant by "silent coronary?"

What factors or conditions are said to predispose the occurrence of a coronary occlusion? List a minimum of five.

20.

21.

22.

23.

24.

Describe the signs and symptoms which indicate that Mr. Stevens is in shock. List a minimum of four.

25.

26.

27.

28.

Plan of care in CCU at admission.
Directions: Fill in the numbered blanks.

Data	Problems	Goals-EOCs	Actions	Rationale & Related Questions
On admission to CCU TPR 99°F (Oral) Apical Pulse 132 (thready, irregular) Respirations 32 (shallow) BP 96/50. Occasional PVC's (premature ventricular contractions) on monitor. C/O chest pain into left arm and neck. Ashen in color. Clammy, perspiring profusely.	Actual: Tissue hypoxia and myocardial damage due to occlusion.	Goal: 1. Increase O_2 perfusion to heart muscle. EOC 1. will state chest pain is gone. 2. Color will be pink. 2. Decrease workload on heart. EOC: 1. SOB will diminish. 2. Pulse will be between 72-84. 3. Respirations will be between 16-20. 4. No increase in PVC's. 5. BP will be $\frac{105}{70}$ to $\frac{120}{80}$	MD Orders 1. O_2 per nasal cannula at 2 l/min. 2. Morphine sulfate 1-2 mg. 95 min until pain is gone or BP down. 3. Bedrest with bedside commode for BM's. 4. Colace 100mg BID. 5. NPO or clear liquid while having pain, then 4 Gm Na diet as tolerated. 6. TED stockings. Nursing Decisions: 1. Semi-Fowler's position. 2. Place NO SMOKING sign at door. 3. Limit visitors to wife and children until stable (at least 1st 24 hrs. 5. Explain CCU routines and policies to family.	For numbered blanks with no question, explain how action at left will help achieve goal <u>as</u> <u>stated</u>. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36.

34

37-55.
The MD has ordered the following lab work. Answer each question briefly. State the reference you used (including page no.)(19 pts.)

	Which tissues release each of these enzymes?	What are the normal values?	When does each enzyme peak if an MI has occurred?
SGOT			
SLDH			
CPK			

	What is being measured by each lab test?	Why has each been ordered?
Sed rate		
BUN		
Hemoglobin		
Hematocrit		
RBC		

Date	Problems	Goals-EOCs	Actions	Rationale and Related Questions
4 hrs. post admission P 110/min. Urine output 40 cc/hr. BP 96/50 Clammy.	Potential cardiogenic shock due to impairment of the pumping action of the heart muscle which results in inadequate cardiac output and tissue perfusion.	1. Early detection of signs of impending cardiogenic shock. EOC's: 1. any signs of impending shock will be detected. 2. MD will be notified before pt. is in full-blown shock. 3. Prevent cardiogenic shock. a. BP will remain $\frac{105}{70}$ to $\frac{120}{80}$ b. Urine output will be at least 40 cc/hour.	MD Orders: 1. Noticy MD for BP↓90, P↓50 or ↑110/min. 2. Portable chest x-ray on admission. 3. Catheterize if unable to void. Nursing Decisions: 1. Accurate I&O. 2. VS $\bar{q}$ 4 h. MD Orders: 1. Levophed drip PRN to keep systolic BP 80 or↑ 2. What special nursing precautions are needed in administering Levophed?	56. 57. 58. 59. 60. 61. 62.

Date	Problems	Goals-EOCs	Actions	Rationale and Related Questions
(cont) 4 hours post admission Apical 92 92 with occasional PVCs.	Potential: Dysrhythmias due to abnormalities of impulse conduction caused by ischemia or infarction.	1. Early detection of dysrhythmias. EOCs: 1. Dysrhythmias will be detected on the monitor and treated appropriately.	MD Orders: 1. Cardiac monitor. 2. Run EKG strip if rhythm changes. 3. Run one strip q 8h for permanent record. 4. EKG now and every day. Nursing Decisions: 1. Take pulses one full minute, apically and radially, q 4 h.	63.-64.
		Goal: 2. Dysrhythmias will be controlled. EOCs: 1. No V. tach or fibrillation 2. No more than occasional PVCs. 3. Pulse rate will be between 72-84	MD Orders: 1. Lidocaine bolus 75 mg then 50 mg IVx2 q 20 min. (for 60-80 kg. body weight) 2. Nurse may defibrillate. 3. VS q 2 h. or more often. 4. Notify MD for P↓50 or↑110/kin. Set alarm for 72-112.	65.

Date	Problems	Goals-EOCs	Actions	Rationale & Related Questions
			5. Serum K^+ and Na^+ $\bar{q}$ day or more often as necessary.	66.
			Nursing Decisions:	
			1. Take oral temperatures, not rectal.	67.
			2. Assess patient's cardiac reactions to CCU restrictions, to activities, to visitors.	
			3. No iced or hot beverages.	
			4. Decaffeinated coffee.	68.
			5. No smoking.	69.

Date	Problems	Goals-EOCs	Actions	Rationale & Related Questions
Day 2 AP 80-90 Normal sinus rhythm no chest pain sitting up, alert, oriented.			1. Explain steps and "routineness" of all procedures, such as EKG, continual cardiac monitoring, need for I.V., etc.	
			2. Teach rationale for avoidance of valsalva maneuver.	70.
			3. Introduce all personnel, orient patient to surroundings.	
			4. Encourage patient to verbalize his reactions and feelings; accept his fears and be reassuring with a calm, quiet, confident approach and performance of duties.	71.
			5. Help Mr. S. move in bed; instruct him not to boost himself to head of bed alone.	72.
			6. Set up tray; allow him to feed himself.	73.
			7. Find out his usual "settle for sleep" routine.	
			8. Do not awaken for V.S.	

Data	Problems	Goals-EOCs	Actions	Rationale & Related Questions
Day 4 Mr.Stevens is very upset about being hospitalized; "My campaign is in critical stage." Very upset about contacting his campaign manager, and not seeing a newspaper. Threatening to leave the hospital if prison rules aren't lifted." P 120/min., occasional PVCs, more when upset. BP 122/84 and stable.	Actual: Maladjustment to CCU routines.	74. Goal:	4. Allow use of telephone to call out; allow campaign manager to visit; watch monitor carefully to evaluate effect of these activities.	
		75 & 76. EOC's:		

77-88. Day 6
Mr. Stevens has been transferred to the post coronary unit.
He will be going home after 3 weeks of hospitalization.
He is making good recovery, is stable and pain free.
List 4 areas of teaching you think are important to cover before Mr. Stevens is discharged, and give at least 2 facts important to teach in each area.

12 pts.

41

89-90 Bibliography used for this study.

2 pt.

Students move through a detailed description of the care appropriate for Mr. Stevens, demonstrating their grasp of the medications, nursing techniques, and emotional attitudes appropriate to the cardiac patient. This material, in itself closed, they must ultimately apply to two open questions.

First, they deal with Mr. Stevens at a point of great agitation on his fourth day of hospitalization as he fears his political campaign is collapsing. He threatens to leave the hospital, and students must explain why, under the circumstances, it is appropriate to allow Mr. Stevens to meet with his campaign manager and make telephone calls. Second, as Mr. Stevens is finally discharged from the hospital, students must advise him about future activities in view of his personal life and current health situation. There are a variety of sound justifications for allowing Mr. Stevens more freedom in the hospital, just as there are a number of sound ways to educate him for the future. Students must make intelligent choices among these options.

This writing assignment demands that students move from general data about nursing a cardiac patient to integration of that data into a particular situation with a patient who has a specific emotional make-up and set of needs. In the activity of writing such assignments, the student begins to make decisions like those she will make as a nurse.

Because the skill required in analysis and synthesis demands so much from the writer, especially when the questions asked are open ones, some instructors use assignments of this kind as take-home exams on which students can work without time pressure.

Professor Mike McShane asks his career orientation students to inventory all they have discovered throughout the quarter about themselves and their career choice, using that information to design a strategy by which to achieve a career goal.

Take Home Final Career Orientation 115

1. Discuss your present career choice and how your interests, abilites, and values lead to this choice.

2. Identify the strengths and skills you already possess in whole or part that will suggest your career choice.

3. Identify strengths and skills you need to acquire and to improve upon to qualify for your career choice.

4. Discuss how the strengths and skills you already possess can help you to acquire those that you still need (as identified in question three above).

5. State sequentially the steps and approximate timetable for your strategy to achieve entry-level qualifications for your career choice. State resources (i.e. human, financial) on which your plan depends; number of years of college necessary; and dates by which you expect to achieve your goals.

If more space is needed, please use other side.

• • • •

Notice Professor McShane's demand for integration of information in question four: the student looks for ways to use her "strengths and skills" to remedy those weaknesses she knows she has. And in question five he asks the student to map out a strategy to achieve her career goals. There

can be no "right" answers in such an exam, but Professor McShane gives students a framework within which they can teach themselves what they need to do to succeed.

Professors Mary Parish and Lois Bollman use a similar pattern of analysis and synthesis and the open question in the final paper they give students in their How To Study class:

• • • •

How to Study Learning Assistance Center

PREPARATION FOR WRITING

During these past class meetings, you have been analyzing yourself as a learner and analyzing yourself as a time manager. This is a useful activity, as the insight you gain from these exercises can help you plan your college curriculum, establish your study method, and structure your study time.

You are working in this class to master the skills of learning. The purpose of this two- to three-page paper is to help you define for yourself who you are as a learner and what you can do to compensate for your weaknesses and build on your strengths.

WRITING YOUR PAPER

1. Describe yourself as a learner.

   A. According to your GED scores and/or ETS scores, what kind of reader and writer are you? What are your math skills? What is your study pattern?

   B. From the time schedules you completed for this class, what have you learned about the time you need and the time you make available for studying?

   C. Use your Cognitive Style Map to analyze your learning style.

      1. What processes of taking-in information do you prefer? (Items 1-20)

2. What problem-solving environment do you prefer? (Items 21-25)

3. What thinking styles do you prefer? (Items 24-28) How do you prefer to think or make decisions?

II. What are the major impediments you see to your being able to use your learning style to your best advantage?

A. In your environment.

1. Your home.

2. Yourself.

B. In the courses you want to or need to take.

III. How do you intend to find a way around the major impediments you see to your using your learning style to your best advantage? That is, what kind of study system and environment do you plan to create for yourself?

* * * *

Professors Parish and Bollman ask first for an analysis of what the student has learned about herself as a learner. Then she must integrate these facts to create a strategy by which she can overcome her learning difficulties by using the strengths she now knows she has. This writing assignment becomes a microcosm of the entire course, bringing it to closure.

Professor Diane Pearson also combines analysis and synthesis with the open question in this take-home midterm examination for her sociology class. She asks students first to analyze their class notes and reading and formulate a hypothetical United Nations report recommending a new world order. No "right" answers are possible here, but Professor Pearson demands that students earn the right to address such a question by integrating data on the economic, social, political, and ideological contexts of three specific societies.

* * * *

MIDTERM TAKE-HOME ESSAY

ASSIGNMENT: You are working on a U.N. project to develop guidelines for a New World Order. You have been sent to study three different societies in order to gain a better understanding of the features you would want to include and the features you would want to omit from the New World Order. The three societies you have been asked to study are: 1) the !Kung, a hunting and gathering society, 2) Japanese and European peasant societies, and 3) 19th century industrial society.

Write the report you will submit to your U.N. project group which describes how life and work is organized and experienced in these three societies. At the end of your report, submit your recommendations for the features of each society that you would or would not include in your New World Order. Be sure to state <u>why</u> you so recommend.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this midterm take-home essay is to give you an opportunity to think in, with, and through your writing about the nature of human societies in order to see how and why studying them can be important.

OBJECTIVES: To show your understanding of life and work in tribal, peasant, and industrial societies.

To illustrate your ability to analyze by pointing out common characteristics as well as the basic differences that exist among these societies.

To reflect on some of the positive and negative features of these societies.

To use your reflection to develop your own vision of society.

EVALUATION CRITERIA:

Quality of your explanation of the way life and work is organized in each society.

Quality of your recommendation and your reasons for it.

APPROXIMATE LENGTH:

Four to five pages or equivalent.

PREPARATION FOR WRITING:

We noted in class that there are similar dimensions to every society, economic, social, political, and ideological. Depending on the society which is being studied, these dimensions take very different shapes. In order to be sure you cover each of these areas fully in each of the societies you will be considering, and also have a way of seeing comparisons and contrasts easily, you might find it helpful to develop an organizational plan of some sort. Here is one:

On the economic level you might want to consider such questions as:

What are the means of production?
What is the division of labor?
Is production for use or exchange? How is exchange handled?

On the social level you might want to consider such questions as:

How do people relate to each other in terms of families, communities, or classes. How are men and women treated?
How are people relating to each other while working or producing?

On the political level you might want to consider such questions as:

Who has power in the society?
Who owns the means of production?
How are the fruits of work or production distributed?

On the ideological level you might want to consider such questions as:

How do people feel and think about work, nature, time, family, community?

• • • •

None of these take-home assignments demands a "right" answer. The teacher looks rather for effective uses of information and sound thinking processes. For the student to defend the answers to which she has committed herself, she must gather information from the course, analyze it for what is relevant, and finally synthesize it into a sophisticated response.

Each of these five principles can help you to develop writing assignments that are more than formal obligations to which neither student nor teacher pays serious attention--despite a high cost to both in time and energy. A good writing assignment initiates dialogue between a teacher and a student, and among the students themselves. Such an assignment opens the mind to possibilities, inviting the creation of forms of thought that connect with each other and the world accurately and intelligibly.

Chapter Three

USING NON-TRADITIONAL WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

The Socratic method is dialogue, question and answer between a student and teacher who investigate, criticize, and if possible harmonize each other's thinking. But American education has far too few teachers for its students and runs on an impersonal assembly-line model. How can students take writing assignments seriously which they suspect no one will read and respond to with care? And how can teachers approach a stack of 75 fifteen-page papers with the feeling that they are about to engage in unhurried dialogue; 30 minutes spent on each paper makes a 40-hour work week of reading. The understandable response of many of us to such numbers is to minimize writing.

But we need not compound these difficulties by adopting what might be called the "term-paper paradigm," the assumption of many teachers that the best writing assignment for students is a long research paper or some equally lengthy variation upon it.

Most teachers, indeed, admit to a cetain uneasiness about what students really learn from producing a term paper. Professor Jack P. Rawlins offers some good reasons for abandoning the term-paper paradigm in an article included in a pamphlet titled <u>How To Increase Literacy Without Becoming an English Teacher:</u>

> Term papers teach students to plagiarize, to substitute collating for thinking, to pad their language to fill pages, to bluster to hide their ignorance, to pretend to expertise they don't have, to associate writing with pointlessness, tedium, lots of wasted time, and the old con game. Term papers, because they are usually due at the end of the term, must often be read and graded cursorily, and the students often never see them again. They have been written, not to initiate a dialogue, but to be graded, a deadly lesson. For all these reasons and more, term papers are terrible vehicles for teaching writing, and few students can write one to their own benefit before their senior year.

ARE THERE ALTERNATIVES TO THE TERM OR RESEARCH PAPER?

There are good alternatives to the term paper--alternatives which offer teachers more dialogue with students and students greater opportunity for genuine learning. More effective than the use of term papers, we believe, is a carefully designed series of brief writing assignments or notebook entries, or a group of several one-paragraph assignments to be done throughout the quarter, or multiparagraph papers or case studies which carefully focus students on a specific problem. In this chapter we will present five formats for writing assignments which we believe are better for students and teachers than the term paper, illustrating all but the first with writing assignments developed by our faculty.

FORMAT 1

FIVE-MINUTE IN-CLASS WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

These short in-class assignments offer control and flexibility that escape in the traditional term paper. The teacher knows she is reading what the student herself wrote. And each assignment can be easily adjusted to fit into a course at any given point. Students' learning is more durable when they themselves are asked to write a few sentences that bring closure to a class lecture, or provide transition into a new topic, or separate main from subordinate points in a lecture. Professor William E.

Coles, Jr., gives us permission to make use of some materials he has developed for the five-minute writing. Professor Coles suggests that a carefully developed and presented sequence of these assignments can teach students more (with the exception of library skills) than the term paper, for such a sequence not only tests recall and retention, but a full range of conceptual skills such as the abilities to discriminate, prioritize, summarize, paraphrase, discover patterns, and make connections. Furthermore, it gives students regular opportunities to develop these skills by providing them with a chance to practice. Here, for example, are some formats teachers can adapt to any class to assign writing to students at the beginning of the next period:

For the past week we have been studying X. I am passing out to you two paragraphs, two statements about X. At the beginning of next period, I am going to ask you to write for five minutes on something involving these two statements about X.

1. In no more than two sentences, state which of these two statements is for you the more correct (or useful, or important, etc.), and explain what makes you say so.

2. These two statements <u>apparently</u> contradict (or are in harmony with) each other. In no more than two sentences explain how they may from another point of view be said to be in harmony with (or be said to contradict) each other.

3. Suppose someone says to you: "I don't see how those two statements connect with X at all." In no more than three sentences explain how there may be said to be a connection between the two statements and X.

4. Here is a third paragraph, a third statement about X. Which one of the two statements you have read is this third statement more in agreement with and what makes you say so? Write no more than two sentences.

5. The two statements given you to study are both statements about X. To judge from what each writer says about X, what would each writer say about Y? Write no more than two sentences.

6. The two statements about X given you to study are not the only perspectives from which X may be considered. Write, in no more than three sentences, what seems to you another important way of accounting for X.

7. Here, in this paragraph, is an account of a situation. Which of the two writers you read for today would have the best way of explaining how this situation came to be (way of remedying the problem this situation poses, way of explaining what this situation is likely to develop into, etc.), and what makes you say so? Confine your answer to no more than three sentences.

The teacher can assign one of these possible questions depending on the two statements she has passed out. And here is a format by which to assign students a writing at the end of the hour:

We have ten minutes left in our class period. Take five of this ten minutes to write in a single sentence:

1. The main point of the lecture/class discussion.

2. The most important question posed by the lecture/class discussion.

3. The most important thing you have learned this period.

4. How the material covered in this class period connects with that of our last class period.

5. What, given this period, we need to turn to next.

Now, exchange papers. Who has what he/she would call a good sentence, and what makes you say so?

Here again the teacher may select one of the five questions as appropriate. You can, of course, develop any number of questions to focus students on essential issues in your course as they arise. An interlocking sequence of brief writing assignments can require that students explain in writing how each major idea presented in your course relates to those developed before and after it. Frequent and brief writing assignments demand that students generate and evaluate ideas in your discipline throughout your course, requiring them to become active learners. These brief writings can be handled very rapidly--in half a minute or so--if you mark them pass/fail and comment sparingly. (See Chapter Five for discussion of efficient and appropriate grading techniques.)

FORMAT 2

ONE PARAGRAPH OR ONE- TO TWO-PAGE WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Any five-minute writing assignment may be profitably extended into an assignment for a paragraph or for a one- to two-page paper by the addition of a second question. Professor Coles' paradigm for creating this question is "Where do you stand with what you have just said?" Teachers can develop many variant forms of this question, all forcing the student to reflect upon the validity or significance of her assertion. Here are some forms of this second question:

1. Explain, as though to a friend, the importance of the argument you have just made to a student of _____.

2. Explain why you agree or do not agree with what you say this person (these people) are saying about X.

3. How, to judge from what you have said, is the discipline of _____ to be defined?

Each of these second questions asks students to synthesize, to evaluate what they have said from a new perspective. Notice how the following one-paragraph writing assignment, developed by Professor Lorrie Kohler for her biology students, contains the same two-question format--and gives the student an audience other than the teacher.

* * * *

Biology 174

In order to understand biology, it is important you begin to <u>think</u> as a biologist, which means, among other things, learning to synthesize some of the major ideas you acquired through your reading, television viewing, lectures, and our class discussions. This writing assignment provides you with an opportunity, through writing, to do that.

Assume you are speaking with a friend about what you have been studying in biology. Your friend has limited knowledge of the biological sciences. Explain to your friend:

> Why life as we know it developed in our solar system <u>only</u> here on the planet earth.

Write <u>no more than a single</u>, well-developed paragraph addressing this problem. You may draw upon anything we have studied in this course together this quarter (from your test, our discussions, television tapes, etc.) Your paragraph will be graded on both its informational and scientific, that is to say its compositional, accuracy (use of logic, grammar, organization, spelling, etc). The paragraph should be written on the back of this paper. If possible, it should be typewritten. The assignment is worth ten points.

* * * *

Analysis is necessary here for the student to begin work. Speaking to a friend about biology, she wants to explain why life in the solar system developed only on earth, and she must analyze the content of her biology course for concepts relevant to that question. Then she must synthesize those concepts into an answer. To fulfill this writing assignment, the student must begin to teach herself the meanings of and interrelations among biological concepts.

FORMAT 3

MULTIPARAGRAPH WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

From the few sentences of the five-minute writing or the few pages of the single paragraph assignment, a teacher can expand the length and difficulty of an assignment as she chooses. It is essential, however, to maintain for students the tight focus of the assignments we have shown you. To tell students simply to "analyze the Smith article on reserve in the library" leaves them to guess at what you will be looking for in their papers. And you will be faced with papers that go in all directions--frustrating to read and time-consuming to evaluate. Notice how carefully Professor Louise Mattila prepares students to do a great deal with what might have been only the busywork of a book report.

* * * *

The Journal Article Analysis Report Biology 140

I. Assignment.

In Biology 140 you must write <u>two</u> journal article analysis reports, the first due _____, the second due _____. Your assignment for each paper is to analyze the content of an article about some aspect of genetics in order to make clear:

1. How the article is connected with material covered in Biology 140, and

2. How the article extends or clarifies what you have learned in Biology 140.

Each of your two papers must be on an article having to do with a different aspect of genetics.

Use the following structure in your two papers.

In paragraph one of your paper indicate precisely how the material in the article relates to Biology 140. Be as specific as possible. Refer to chapters and/or sections in our text or to the specific lecture which dealt with the matter of your article. (It is probable

that the article will relate to more than one portion of Biology 140.)

In paragraph two indicate specifically what material in Biology 140 helps you to understand the article.

In paragraph three discuss how the article takes you beyond what you learned in class. New applications are always a good choice here. Or you might discuss how the article has helped you understand the course. If you have difficulty writing this paragraph, consider whether the article is too basic, does not expand your knowledge enough, or is too advanced.

In paragraph four explain the value of what you learned from the article. Why is it valuable to study new applications in this field?

II. Source of material.

The Minneapolis Community College library has a number of science journals, as do the city libraries. Do not deal with an article on an aspect of genetics we have not yet covered in class. If you have any questions or are unsure whether an article is appropriate or not, please ask the instructor.

III. Style instructions for the analysis papers. (See example attached.)

1. All papers are to be one page in length, typed, double-spaced, on 8 1/2 x 11 inch unlined, white paper. One page will be approximately 250 words.

2. Place your name and the date in the upper right-hand corner (lines four and five from the top.)

3. Place the title of the article in quotation marks on line seven followed on the same line by the name of the author and journal, and the page numbers. Underline the name of the journal.

4. Start your analysis on line eleven and double-space it, leaving about one-inch margins on the left and right side of the paper.

5. Carefully proofread your analysis before turning it in. Correct all spelling, grammatical, and typographical errors.

IV. Style instructions for the articles. (See example attached.) All articles (or a copy) are to be submitted in accordance with the following instructions.

1. The article should be a minimum of one page in length.

2. If the name of the publication, date, and page number do not appear on the article, then indicate these at the bottom right corner of the first page of the article.

3. Write your name in the right-hand corner on the first page of the article.

4. Please use a paper clip to attach the article to the analysis paper, not staples, transparent tape, or folded corners.

V. Grading.

The two papers constitute 15% of your quarter grade. Your grade in points will be indicated along with comments. In evaluating this assignment I will consider your choice of article, the quality of analysis of it, and the quality of your writing (the clarity with which you reason, go to the trouble to be clear, etc.). Ten percent of any points you earn will be subtracted for each school day late.

After you have gone over the comments on your papers, the paper and article should be returned to the instructor for possible use as examples for future classes. Therefore if you wish to retain the material, you will need to make copies.

[Note: The original assignment had an article attached for students to examine.]

* * * *

In writing these four paragraphs the student goes from a simple analysis of what in the article relates to the

material of the course to an evaluation of what importance the article might have in the field of biology. By moving students through four tightly interlocking questions, Professor Mattila helps students use the process of writing to discover the significance of specific developments in biology to the field as a whole.

FORMAT 4

THE CASE STUDY

The case study offers a student a complex, realistic human situation, one that mirrors what she will, in one form or another, encounter in her field. It asks her to analyze given data, sifting the relevant from the irrelevant, and finally to apply what she has learned to the solution of a specific problem.

Because his nursing students will be working with the specific medical needs of individual patients, Professor Jeff Paurus asks in this case study that students review the relevant medical history of a surgical patient and develop a sound approach to her nursing care. This assignment was developed cooperatively by Professor Paurus and the other faculty teaching first-year nursing students.

• • • •

SURGICAL PATIENT CARE STUDY

The following case study refers to Mrs. Easton and her hospitalization for surgery. Using this information, develop a complete and specific plan of care for this surgical patient. The plan of care may be written in a narrative format or in the traditional nursing care plan form. Be sure your paper includes:

A. A brief but accurate description of the diagnosis and surgical procedure.

B. Identification of actual and potential interferences with basic needs that the patient may experience preoperatively (the day before surgery), the day of surgery (including post-anesthesia room and operating room), and postoperatively (including her immediate return to her room and the first postoperative day).

C. Selection of appropriate preoperative and postoperative nursing interventions.

D. Documentation of the correct rationale for each of these nursing interventions.

Grading

You will receive points for properly identified actual and/or potential preoperative and postoperative interferences with basic needs, appropriate goals and nursing interventions, and well-stated rationale.

Description of diagnosis and surgical procedure	3 points
Preoperative plan of care	5 points
Postoperative plan of care	10 points
References (minimum of two nursing textbooks and one journal)	2 points

Please note: Since good nursing is a matter of care, accuracy, and efficiency, points may be lost in all of the above areas for incorrect grammar and spelling, lack of clarity, sloppy organization and expression, etc.

Mrs. Easton, 36 years old, was diagosed as having uterine fibroid one year ago. For the last six months she has had progressively more bleeding between her menstrual periods. On January 10, Mrs. Easton visited her gynecologist who performed a complete blood count. The results showed that her hemoglobin had dropped from 12 grams% to 11 grams% since her last visit. Because of this chronic blood loss from the uterine fibroid, her physician scheduled Mrs. Easton for an abdominal hysterectomy on January 17. She is admitted to the surgical unit on the afternoon of January 16.

Nursing admission history and physical gives the following information:

> Height 5'2", Weight 74 kg., Temp 98, Pulse 88 and regular, BP 122/76, and respirations 20. Mrs. Easton states that she has no allergies; she smokes a pack of cigarettes a day. She has never had surgery before and has only been in the hospital when she had her three children. She has two sons, ages fourteen and eight, and a daughter,

age two. Her husband is an engineer who is frequently out of town on business trips. The family has no relatives in town, but her mother lives about four hours away. Mrs. Easton's interests include gardening, knitting, and involvement in their local church activites. She does not work outside the home because she believes that a woman should be a full-time wife and mother. She asks the nurse if removal of the uterus will have any effects on her ability to carry out her roles at home.

Laboratory results:

Chest X-ray appears normal.
EKG within normal limits.
Urinalysis shows all values within the normal range.

Electrolytes:

Na	138	mEq/L
K	3.5	mEq/L
Cl	94	mEq/L
CO_2	26	mEq/L

Preoperative Orders (January 16):

Scrub abdomen, nipple to groin, for ten minutes with Betadine the night before and morning of surgery
Tap water enema at H.S.
Clear Liquid diet
NPO after midnight
Type and crossmatch for two units of whole blood
Insert foley catheter morning of surgery
Start liter of 5% Dextrose 0.45 Normal Saline with 20 mEq KCl per liter.
Infuse at 100 cc/hr. Start infusion at 6 A.M.
Seconal 100 mg P.O.H.S. tonight
Demerol 75 mg IM on call for O.R.
Atropine gr. 1/150 IM on call for O.R.

Postoperative Orders (January 17):

5% Dextrose 0.45 Normal Saline with 20 mEq/L KCl to infuse IV at 100cc/hr until able to tolerate liquids P.O., then decrease IV rate to 50 cc/hr.
Clear liquids as tolerated. If no nausea, advance diet as tolerated.
Foley catheter to straight drainage
I and O
Routine postoperative VS
Turn, cough and deep breathe every two hours
Incentive spirometer every four hours

Dangle tonight, then ambulate qid starting tomorrow
Recheck CBC at 8 P.M. tonight
Ampicillin 1 gram intravenously every 6 hours times four doses
Demerol 75 mg IM every four hour PRN for pain
Vistaril 25 mg IM Demerol every four hours PRN
Change dressing PRN

* * * *

Case studies of this sort are extremely effective in confronting students with a hypothetical situation in which the writing decisions they make are simultaneously decisions about how to handle certain problems they may face as professionals. (For other such case studies, examine the assignments by Professors Davis, Paurus, Tasaka and Swedberg, and Trenchard and Miller.) The case approach can also establish a well-defined framework within which students can address specific intellectual problems. (For examples of this see the assignments by Professors Pruitt, Makar, and Pearson.)

FORMAT 5

THE NOTEBOOK

There are many uses of the notebook. At one end of the spectrum, it can be a collection of personal reflections relevant to a class but not intended for other students or the teacher to read; at the other, it can be a place where students work out formal responses to formal questions which the teacher will grade. (Professor Humphreys' formal notebook assignment for a statistics class is a good example of the latter.)

One use of the notebook comes from asking students to create a dialogue format. Pages should be vertically halved, providing space on one side for the students' observations, reflections and questions, and on the other side for your response. If you want evidence that students' minds are creatively roaming, exploring, questioning, and working in your discipline, give them provocative questions and ask that they write answers in their notebook, upon which you in turn can comment.

If your purpose is simply to determine if a student is reading or if she is awake in class, then give a few quiz questions which the student answers in her notebook. Requiring the student herself to ask in her notebook at least one question a week about your discipline, one that truly piques her curiosity, encourages her to take responsibility for her own learning, and gives you an opportunity to respond as an authority in the field.

Consider how Professor Hugh Yamamoto uses the notebook in his Problem Solving class to encourage students to reflect on how the skills they are studying can be applied to their daily living situations.

* * * *

Problem Solving Natural Science 120

Keeping a Journal

Throughout the balance of the quarter you will be asked to keep a journal in which you record your experiences with problem-solving situations. You must have at least one entry per week, none of which need be more than one paragraph long. The purpose of keeping a journal is to get you to reflect on your experiences in or out of class as they relate to what you have learned in it. That is, the keeping of this journal will get you to discover ways in which our discussions have somehow affected your behavior or thinking outside of class.

Each journal entry should include a date, a description of the setting or situation, a description of the behavior, and a description of the outcomes, whether they were positive or negative. That is, you may choose to describe incidents in which you employed correct problem-solving behavior or incidents where, in hindsight, you would do things a different way.

Your journal entries will be made in little "blue books," which the instructor will provide. You will be asked to turn in your journals every two weeks. At the time you turn in your journal, you will be provided with another "blue book."

Since the purpose of this exercise is to get you to think about this course as often as possible under as many different circumstances as possible, try to describe your experiences so

that I can visualize your scenario as clearly as possible. Do not worry about the style or spelling of your entries. However, do pay attention to grammar when it determines how you connect one idea or statement with another. I will be using your journal to help me understand you as a learner and problem solver in order that I may do what I can to help you improve in each role. The suggestions I might have to make will be either in writing or by conference or both.

I anticipate that this exercise will be mutually beneficial and informative. If you have any concerns regarding this exercise, please ask your questions either during class time or in my office, whichever seems to be best for you.

* * * *

The notebook assignments by Professors Humphreys and Yamamoto require students to apply their formal learning to situations that arise in daily living. And since the framework is the notebook, a teacher can insist that this writing be done frequently--even daily--to keep the student constantly aware of practical applications of her learning. To handle a large volume of such writing, a teacher may wish to evaluate the notebook entries pass/fail and comment upon them sparingly. Or certain entries may be graded A through F and counted in a specific way toward the quarter grade. The discussion in Chapter Five of pass/fail grading of five-minute writings offers some useful suggestions.

WHAT ARE SOME OTHER USES FOR THE NOTEBOOK?

There are many alternatives. All of the types of questions discussed in Chapter Two and any of the formats discussed in this chapter can be structured for use in a notebook. Here are some others. Entries are most effective when they are short, varied between in- and out-of-class assignments, and when they count in some specific way toward the quarter grade.

BRIEF SUMMARIES

In the last minutes of a class, ask a student to enter a few sentences that summarize the main points covered

during the hour. In addition to keeping her alert and attentive, she is encouraged to separate main from supporting points, a skill basic to every academic discipline. An extension of this is to ask a student to summarize the main ideas of an article you have placed on reserve in the library.

CONNECTING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

Ask a student to consider what was discussed in class that day or week and to record some manifestation of that in her life. For example, a journalism student who is working on the definitions of libel and slander could be asked to explain why a story printed or broadcast that week might provoke such a charge.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Ask a student to observe and take notes on a situation relevant to the course. For example, a student studying the problems of the unemployed in a human relations class might be asked to spend thirty minutes in a temporary employment office observing and recording in her notebook what she sees.

PRETENDING

Ask a student to place herself in a hypothetical situation. Ask how she would have responded and why. For example, "William Swain, a printer in New York without much printing to keep him busy in the early part of the last century, turned down an offer to be a partner in the first 'penny press.' What would you have done and why?" Such questions engage a student's interest while demanding that she thoroughly understand the situation into which she is placed.

QUESTIONS

Ask a student to develop five questions from her class notes and outside reading which would make good examination

questions. Promise that the five sharpest questions will indeed appear in the midquarter or the final.

LETTERS

Students respond well to this familiar and realistic format for a piece of writing. Ask a gerontology class studying the effects on the elderly of pending zoning legistation before the city council to write letters to their representatives. Then pass out envelopes and collect the letters for mailing. Writing that reaches a real audience--in this case an influential one--can generate more purposeful discussion about course content among students than any quiz or formal essay. The letter format provides what every writer wants--a built-in listener, a familiar writing mode, a worthwhile message, and a chance to have it make a difference.

Notebook assignments work best if they are short and frequent. Their impact increases when they are developed in a coherent sequence through the quarter and steadily escalate in the demands they place on students. For example, skill in summary is basic to learning in any discipline. Frequent assignments at the beginning of the course asking students to pay attention and summarize content can be followed later in the course by assignments which ask for analysis in addition to summary. A history teacher might finish a discussion of the invention of the printing press in the 1450's by asking students to summarize what a certain author said about its impact on western society. Then later in the quarter she can ask students to identify another invention that caused a similar disruption in western Europe in that century and explain their choices--an assignment that requires summation, analysis, and synthesis.

These are some writing formats with which you might wish to experiment in your classes. Each moves from the formal monologue of the term paper back toward the possibility of dialogue--dialogue between student and teacher, student and other students, student and a hypothetical audience, and student and a real audience outside the classroom. Taken together, these formats permit teachers to handle papers in a variety of ways--from pass/fail evaluation made without comment, to an informal

and brief written dialogue in a student's notebook, to the traditional letter grade and comment.
These formats, used to present open questions that employ a pattern of analysis and synthesis, can both give meaning to students' writing and permit teachers to assign more writing at an acceptable cost in time.

Chapter Four

PREPARING STUDENTS TO SUCCEED AS WRITERS

To present writing as a mode of learning, as a way to understand something, will disturb students at first. Initially many of them will resent writing assignments, for they have written little and remember little about it except for failure. The more you can tell them in advance about what they will write and how you will grade it, the fewer confused questions you will face. Students will be in a better position to see the value of writing for themselves.

WHERE DO I BEGIN THIS PREPARATION?

The first place you can give students your plans for their writing is in the syllabus. There you let them know from the outset of the course that writing is integral to your class and that you take it seriously enough to tell them clearly what you expect.

Tell students in your syllabus that their English is important and that it "counts." When, in order to relieve students' anxieties and ease the grading burden, teachers tell students they will grade only "ideas" and ignore English, they create more problems for themselves than they solve. Such a policy may seem encouraging, a way to make writing less threatening, but it gives students permission to view written language as trivial, as separable from content, as that which only their English teachers care about. As a result many students will be careless in matters of form they understand quite well, and even fewer will try to improve.

In making English count, however, don't tell students you will split the grade by evaluating compositional form and discipline content separately. While this technique appears to simplify grading for you, it again teaches students that meaning and language are ultimately separable. The student in a non-English course then considers (and with good reason) a low "form" grade unfair: ("But this is a music class, not English. If my ideas are an A, why don't you give me an A for the course?") And the split grade costs you time. Each paper must be graded twice and the two grades somehow balanced to be a fair overall grade. Far better to insist in your syllabus that bad English of any sort, like static, interferes with a writer's message and casts doubt on her authority and will be graded down for that reason.

There are, of course, as many ways of conveying this message to students as there are teaching styles. Consider again the way in which Professors Margaret Trenchard and Nancy Miller have (in an assignment presented in Chapter Two) equated attention to language with attention to nursing: "Since care and precision are an important part of nursing, points may be lost . . . for carelessness in spelling, grammar, punctuation, poor logic, or lack of clarity." As one nursing instructor commented, language error on a patient record in the hospital is not just bad English; it can be life threatening.

Here is another approach in this excerpt from Professor Erik Storlie's syllabus for a humanities class:

> Your papers will be graded both on careful fulfillment of the assignment and on compositional accuracy. Just as inaccurate facts disrupt communication, so does inaccurate English. Bad writing suggests you are careless and neither take yourself seriously as a college student nor think this course very important. Poor handwriting, misspellings, grammatical errors, lack of thoughtful organization, and pointless slang represent you badly. Because I know you are better than that, I will return such work for rewriting before I read and grade it.

Professor Storlie turns back to the student the responsibility to make herself as good as she can be.

Here is yet a third approach in this excerpt from a syllabus for a science course:

> Students sometimes ask why I routinely expect writing in a science class. They may think that writing is a "subject" like physics or history and has no business entering classes where it's not welcome. It is true that there are specific courses in "English" or "composition," but these are analogous to the math courses in a science curriculum.
>
> To be an effective student in the sciences, you need fluency in the English language, just as you need fluency in the language of mathematics. Your efforts to convert complex scientific facts, theories, and practices into clear written form will help you to comprehend what you are doing and persuade me that you have truly understood what you're writing about. When you read or write, study or teach, consult or do research in a scientific field, you will be called upon to comprehend and explain ideas in the English language. Therefore its correct and intelligent use will be part of your training in this class and will "count."

This teacher equates the language of English with mathematical language, an equation appropriately extended also to foreign languages, musical language, and computer languages, among others.

While the approaches to "counting" English by these three teachers are quite different, all three explain to students <u>why</u> they take writing seriously and <u>what</u> this will mean for them. Each teacher has in effect created a contract with her student that says: "the care I have put into my writing of this syllabus is my way of creating the authority to demand that you give equal care to your writing."

Language in your syllabus about the importance of language is futile, of course, if students disregard what you have said. You may direct their attention to the

syllabus by reading it to the class and then surprise them with a simple true/false quiz. Here, for example, is one on Professor Storlie's humanities syllabus quoted earlier. To score 100% requires attentive reading. Try it and see.

1. English form counts 50% of the grade on each writing assignment.

   _____

2. I will mark any grammatical errors I see on your papers.

   _____

3. I will give you two grades: one for form and one for content.

   _____

4. If you use grammar and spelling carelessly, your paper will get an automatic F.

   _____

5. Never use slang in college writing.

   _____

An effective classroom strategy here is to jot down the number of wrong answers at the top of each paper (without marking which questions are wrong). In the next period pass the quizzes back for students to retake until they get a perfect score, or to correct on their own, or whatever. Such an exercise forces attention to the syllabus and to the importance you give to written communication. Just as what students write for you will count, what you have written for them counts too.

WHAT KINDS OF THINGS CAN I SAY IN MY SYLLABUS ABOUT THE WRITING ASSIGNMENTS THEMSELVES?

Your students will get the most from their writing if you tell them in the syllabus how many papers they will write and of what sort, what length, when due, how they will be evaluated, and what they will count in points or percentage. Here, for example, is an excerpt from Professor Storlie's syllabus that quickly establishes each of these points:

> In this course you will write three one-paragraph papers (not to exceed one page in length). They will compare certain outside readings with material from your text and the class lectures. Due at the end of the third, seventh, and ninth weeks of the term respectively, each paper will be given a letter grade and each will count 10% of your quarter grade (a total of 30% for your writing).

If you were to decide to assign students frequent pass/fail writing assignments instead of papers, writing on which you did not intend to comment regularly, brief discussion in the syllabus could help to convince them that such writing has a meaningful place in the course, that it counts, and that it is carefully calculated to aid them to learn. Professor William E. Coles, Jr., has given us permission to use an excerpt from a syllabus, which explains in great detail how he plans to handle a sequence of five-minute in-class writing assignments:

> You will write in this class a series of five-minute writing assignments, sometimes done at the beginning of class and sometimes at the end. The purpose of these assignments (there will be fifteen throughout the term) is to give you practice in focusing on the essentials in an argument, in going to the core of an issue, in seeing to the heart of things. Some assignments will deal with outside readings, some with subjects raised in lectures or class discussion. Most will ask that you write only a few sentences.

I will grade these assignments pass or fail (P/N) only, and will give each assignment back to you the period following the class in which you write it. I will not write comments on any of these papers, but we will frequently go over examples of both adequate and inadequate responses in class.

You must pass at least eight of these fifteen assignments in order to pass this course. No assignment may be made up, and all missing assignments count as failure.

If you have taken and failed three of these fifteen assignments, I encourage you to discuss the matter with me in my office. But you will have to initiate the meeting. I cannot help someone who will not take the first step to work on a difficulty they are having with learning.

Such detailed preparation in the syllabus for a series of pass/fail writing assignments justifies to students their not getting letter grades or individual comment and informs them that the assignments are designed to help them develop a mastery of the course material. Their writing is for their, not the teacher's, benefit. An assignment which might be taken as no more than an annoying form of busywork if presented verbally is given meaning when spelled out in the syllabus.

HOW CAN I PRESENT WRITING ASSIGNMENTS SO THEY ARE CLEAR TO STUDENTS?

We suggest that you do two things to help students see clearly what you are asking of them. First, give attention to details of format and layout such as numbering, indentation, underlining, and highlighting with open space. Neglect of these details can cause misreadings and misunderstandings that cost dearly in time when individual students ask for clarifications or when you mark confused papers. Notice how Professor Michael Robertson uses all of these features to clarify his intent in the following assignment for theatre students.

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING THE PLAY CRITIQUE THEATRE

In order to pass the course, each student must write two short (one to three pages) play critiques, the purpose of which is to help students deepen their appreciation of theatre by exploring essential aspects of the live theatre experience. BOTH OF THESE PAPERS MUST BE TYPED. You may lose credit if your writing is not done at a college level.

The purpose of the play critique is less to evaluate a play and/or the ability of a playwright than it is to evaluate the production of a play (how well a particular play was done), to judge from the performance (or performances) of it you saw.

The following guidelines are to help you focus on the most important aspects to consider when evaluating the production of a play. Following them in your writing will give your paper coherence as well as enabling you to make an informed judgment of the quality of a particular production. Use specific examples from the performance to support your judgments. For instance, if you feel the "acting was effective throughout the production," give examples of specific scenes and actors which made those particular scenes effective.

1. DIRECTION
   What kind of concept has the director developed with which to unify the production? How well does this concept realize the playwright's intent as you understand it? How appreciative would you call this production of this play? Or how imaginative, or perceptive, or inventive, or tasteful? Make clear what you mean in your use of terminology of this sort. If the production you saw was "sensitive," be sure you explain what you mean in saying so. If the production you saw was "inventive" in some ways, but not in others, be sure to specify from what such a split judgment comes.

2. ACTING
   To what extent did the actors of this play work together as a unit? How well did the actors seem to realize the director's intent? In what ways did the acting in this production bring (or fail to bring) the material of the play to life?

How appropriately did the scenery reflect the director's intent? Did the scenery contribute to the total aesthetic impression? Were the costumes appropriate for the characters in this production? How was the lighting in the production used? Did the lighting contribute unobtrusively to the total aesthetic impression and give adequate visibility to the actors? How were the sound effects or music used in this production?

4. AUDIENCE RESPONSE
To judge from what actually happened at the performance (Was there laughter and of what sort? Was there absorbed silence, bored silence? Was there rustling, coughing, talking?), was the audience entertained, moved, held in suspense, indifferent, restless, or what? Did the response of the audience seem appropriate to the director's intention?

5. CHOICE OF PLAY
To judge from your response to guidelines one through four above, how successful would you say this production of this play was? How wise a choice was it for the director to put on this play as he/she did, with this cast, in this theatre, for the audience of which you were a member?

* * * *

Professor Robertson uses underlining and capitalization for emphasis and separates discrete parts of the assignment by numbering each and placing white space between them. He emphasizes that students are evaluating, not a play or playwright, but the "<u>production</u>" of a play. He then breaks this evaluation into five components, clearly directing students' attention to each. Without this care, students could easily miss (or ignore) parts of the task set for them.

A second way to help students understand exactly what you want is to give students directions in the clearest language possible, even if you repeat yourself and belabor what (to you) is the obvious. Repetition of key words and phrases, repetition of essential directions, repetition of important ideas and questions in new words--all these can help you to drive your point home to students. Anything you can do, however lengthy or repetitive, to clarify for

students your intentions can save you (and them) time. Notice how Professor Jan Skogstrom, in addition to the use of effective layout and formatting, breaks down into three very specific questions this assignment for her human services students.

* * * *

Future Trends
Opinion/Position Paper
Human Services 101

Purpose

As a human service worker, you will be (as indeed you already are) living and working during a period of transition and change. To be effective as a worker and as a citizen, it is important to be able to reasonably assess trends in your field in order that you may act either to influence the trend or prepare yourself to work within its framework, or possibly both. An uninformed reactor, operating only from potential crisis to crisis, is an ineffective human service worker.

The Assignment

Write a paper in which you do three things:

1. Describe the three current trends that you think are already having or are going to have the most significant impact on human services.

2. Explain how you believe each of these three trends is going to affect the future direction of services, the education of workers, etc. (that is, analyze its possible impact on these areas).

3. Explain in the case of each trend whether, as a human service worker, you believe you will try to influence the trend (and how) or prepare yourself to work within its framework, or both (and how).

This is not a research paper. Rather, it is meant to be an analysis of material presented in class on this topic through discussions, lectures, videotapes, readings, etc. When pertinent, pay particular attention to information discussed regarding Alvin Toffler, Fritjof Capra, and Willis Harmon.

Your paper should, of course, be well written and free of the "static" of spelling, typing, and grammatical errors. It is difficult for me to take seriously work which suggests that the writer has not. I prefer typed papers.

If you don't feel confident about your writing skills or would like help in learning to proofread your paper, you can get assistance from the Learning Assistance Center (LAC) located at the north end of the Hennepin Avenue Skyway.

The paper is due _____, and is worth 35 points.

• • • •

Professor Skogstrom carefully sets out how she wants students to move through their discussion of three trends in human services: from a simple description of each, to a discussion of their possible impacts in the future, and then to an evaluation by the student of how she will position herself in relation to these trends as a human service worker. Students know precisely what is expected of them.

WHAT KINDS OF CLASSROOM DISCUSSION CAN HELP PREPARE STUDENTS TO WRITE?

Few students told in class and on your syllabus to "Be clear, logical, and well organized, and proofread carefully" will know exactly what you mean. Passing out a few specific examples in class can <u>show</u> them what, in your eyes, makes a bad or a good paper. Here are a pair of student papers you might wish to photocopy and experiment with, or you can take examples from your discipline. We leave grades and teachers' comments on these papers--though you might prefer to leave them off.

The "F" Paper

First of all I don't think Jeff. or Franklin or Carnege know much about world we live in so why go over what they thought. Everyone knows making money is what counts you are what you make. Try to get a nice house if you're not making it. So its not worth talking geting rid of inheritances. No one will work if the gov is goin to get it. The trouble with Americans today is all who want other peoples money and won't work themseves. I was kind of surprised that Carnegie wasnt for inheritance. But he had such a tough go that maybe he thot if he had to do it even his kids should to. but who wants to.

Comment:

Your careless mechanics suggest you haven't taken this assignment seriously. Get help at the Learning Assistance Center, rewrite, and turn this in again.

Chances are that serious students will be far harsher toward the writer of this paper than you would ever think of being, while students who were thinking that this was the kind of work they might try to get by with will be alerted to the fact that in <u>this</u> class careless writing is noticed, and it costs dearly.

The "A" Paper

I agree with Jefferson and Carnegie's opposition to inheritance insofar as inheritance doesn't encourage the inheritors to develop their talents and be enterprising. But the real issue is what motivates individuals to be enterprising, to <u>become</u> wealthy, and in that way to benefit society. Certainly the chance to create a family fortune and dynasty motivates people. In any society individuals must be sacrificed to the greatest good to some extent, and here the inheritors of wealth who never have to develop their talents are sacrificed (although they don't think so) along with the poor. To argue against inheritance is idealistic but impractical. Sure it's not <u>fair</u> for the non-enterprising to benefit from unearned wealth, and it's not <u>fair</u> for poor people to suffer, but if inheritance benefits

everyone in the long run by energizing many people to achieve, then it's good.

Comment

Well argued. But <u>does</u> it really work in the long run? What if the <u>majority</u> get sacrificed?

This paper, of course, is harder to discuss than the first, but students quickly sense its use of evidence and organization, even if they disagree with it or are unfamiliar with the issues. The teacher can point out first the absence of error, and then move on to the writer's willingness to stick to a single main idea--that inheritance is good social policy--and to give evidence and reasoned arguments in its defense. The writer might be wrong, but the teacher (who voices some disagreement in her comment) grades on effective presentation, not a party line. An exercise such as this one helps students see how bad a piece of sloppy work looks and how easily good work can be recognized.

By passing out such sample papers, a teacher can deal in advance with the general run of skeptical and occasionally hostile questions about why English counts in a math or music class or why writing is assigned at all. A teacher now can further elaborate on the idea that she no more needs to be an English teacher to recognize good English than she needs to be a mechanic to know her car is losing power on the freeway, or to decide, when it does, that she will take it to a garage. Students see graphically the difference in writing and thought between the A and the F papers--that one has pulled together ideas in language that sheds light on something, and that the other has done worse than nothing.

This, of course, won't guarantee all good papers. But such preliminary classroom work, combined with clear writing assignments and syllabus information about them, can sharply improve the quality of what the teacher gets and establish her authority--an authority based on her thoughtful and thorough preparation--to assign and evaluate written work.

Chapter Five

SAVING YOURSELF TIME WHEN MARKING PAPERS

In traditional grading, a student paper is handled as a product, the primary purpose of which is to help establish a grade. Such grading is necessarily time-costly, the teacher ranking each paper on some objective scale and making comments to explain and defend that ranking. The teacher becomes her students' adversary, sparking their resentment of an interaction in which few are prepared to do very well. In this context, most teachers avoid assigning writing for obvious reasons: generally bad papers, frequently resentful students, and a time-consuming and frustrating grading process. This vicious circle in effect limits students' writing opportunities because they write so infrequently and so poorly.

WHAT DO YOU PROPOSE INSTEAD OF THE "TRADITIONAL" MODEL OF PAPER GRADING?

We suggest that teachers work with writing less as a graded product and more as an activity and process of learning, an approach which permits the handling of papers in a variety of ways. Writing as an activity of learning is analogous to music practice. When a piano teacher hears a work in progress, she does not tape it, take it home, and grade it, writing an exhaustive commentary on its strengths and weaknesses. Rather she listens and frequently stops the student, perhaps demonstrating a clever left-hand trick or correcting a defect in rhythm. It is the student's job to practice, the teacher's to guide in such a way as to

encourage further and more effective practice. Writing practice, like music practice, can be an ongoing activity of learning which is subjected only periodically to the pressure of formal evaluation. If in your class you stress writing primarily as learning activity, you may choose never to subject it to formal A through F grading.

WHAT ARE SOME SPECIFIC GRADING TECHNIQUES THAT CAN HELP ME TO HANDLE WRITING AS A PROCESS RATHER THAN AS A PRODUCT?

We can suggest five strategies by which to modify the time-consuming traditional model of "grading," permitting you to handle papers quickly and responsibly. These techniques can expand your opportunities to experiment with a variety of writing assignments at an acceptable cost in time.

1. ASSIGN SHORT WRITINGS AND GRADE THEM PASS/FAIL.

Teachers do not need to assign long papers. Students can learn more from short, frequent assignments such as the five-minute writing or the notebook assignment, and teachers can rapidly handle large numbers of short writings by evaluating them pass/fail. In Chapter Four we present Professor Coles' assignment of fifteen five-minute in-class writings--one of the most time-efficient strategies by which to introduce meaningful writing into your classroom.

Students write for five minutes in class an average of twice weekly, the teacher returning the writings at the next class marked P/N but without further comment. Class time is given to discussing examples of passing and failing responses and students are encouraged to consult with the teacher if they have questions or if they have failed three or more writings.

This assignment requires students to write frequent and brief papers in a discipline, yet permits the teacher to respond flexibly to them, giving them more or less time as she is able. When time permits, she can read a batch of these papers thoroughly (still a task that takes only 30 seconds or so for each one), pulling out examples of passing papers to bring to class for discussion. When the teacher is pressed for time, she can assume that most papers will

pass, scanning them quickly or spot-checking the work of students who are having difficulty. When she must, to keep students writing and the papers flowing, she can (in good conscience) pass everything that comes in. Why should she give students less writing because she lacks time? (Does the music teacher listen to every practice session of each student?) Her goal is not to read everything they write, but to keep them regularly engaged in writing as an activity of learning. The student's payoff comes, not from a teacher's written comments, but from gaining in skill as a writer and learner. The teacher's payoff is in more flexibility in what she can assign and increased teaching effectiveness.

2. HAVE STUDENTS PROOFREAD AND CRITIQUE EACH OTHER'S PAPERS.

Another technique to get more learning from the five-minute (or any other) writing assignment is occasionally to defer collecting papers. Take ten minutes at the end of a class for students to pair up and exchange papers. Ask them to proofread and make a brief written critique of each other's work. Then ask that everyone take their own papers home and revise them in light of what they have now learned from critiqueing and being critiqued. Such an exercise costs you only ten minutes of class time, yet works all the intellectual muscles: thinking, writing, critiqueing, and responding to criticism. Students benefit because their writing gains a wider audience (their peers as well as you), motivating them to examine their writing critically with an eye to improving it. You benefit because you get a revision free and what you finally read is more thoughtful and polished--and easier to grade.

3. USE DISCUSSION GROUPS

To capitalize further on the power of a peer group used as audience, set up discussion groups to hear and comment on students' writing. Students want your comment on papers, not just for evaluation, but from a legitimate need to be heard by someone who responds. This response needn't come exclusively or even primarily from you. The class is a ready-made audience whose attention is more motivating than your own. Consider devoting all or part of a 50-minute class period to an in-house writing review of an assignment due that day. Suppose, for example, students have written a comparison and contrast paragraph on two articles, a paragraph you intend to grade pass/fail.

If you want to give ten minutes to this process, ask students to pair up, exchange papers, and proofread for each other, permitting each writer to make any corrections she wishes on her own paper. Because they improve their chances of passing, students are motivated to scrutinize their papers carefully, while you can grade their work more quickly because it is better and more of it will pass.

If you can give 25 more minutes of class time, go on to assign students to groups of four or five, asking each group to designate a timekeeper who gives each member five minutes to read her paper aloud and respond to comments. You can expedite this process by offering a specific question for groups to address, such as "Does the paper discuss the major similarities and differences between the two articles? Which, if any, are omitted?"

If you wish to use the remaining fifteen minutes of class time, ask each timekeeper to summarize an outstanding paper from the group, reading at least one key section as time permits. Or moderate a general discussion, permitting students to direct questions at individuals or groups. Before the hour is up, turn to the question of writing itself. Could some of these papers be improved, both in mechanics and in their statement of ideas? Would the class like another day to improve the papers? While some students will want to turn their papers in immediately, decline them. Give every student an opportunity to improve her work by the next class period. In-class writing reviews such as these reduce your load by improving student writing and learning.

Having an audience they fear and respect--their peers--students begin to see writing as more than an "assignment," as indeed a form of serious (and potentially embarrassing) communication. You are relieved of the burden of being the student's only audience--a burden whose weight you won't fully appreciate until it is removed--and you often get a thorough revision done "free," improving the papers you read and making them easier to grade.

4. DON'T WASTE TIME RED PENCILLING PAPERS.

We don't recommend traditionally "responsible" grading practice: marking mechanical errors, noting and even rewriting awkward sentences, suggesting organizational changes, maintaining a running marginal commentary, and finally in lengthy comments explaining and justifying the grade. While useful at times when working intensively with an individual student on a specific writing project, such techniques don't help a majority of students to learn to write in your discipline. And they sharply limit the amount of writing that any teacher, however dedicated, can assign.

But what should you, a non-English teacher, do with the paper in which error obscures the meaning? Should you force yourself through the paper? We suggest not. You will save time and give the student a chance to deal with her writing problem by returning the paper and requesting revision. You might simply make a comment like this: "This is unacceptable. Please ask for help at the Learning Assistance Center, rewrite, and resubmit." Or in a marginal case reduce the student's grade and comment: "You have lost credit on this paper because your frequent mechanical errors and disorganized thinking hide and confuse your ideas about geology." Notice that in this comment the teacher has not told the student she has gone from a B- to a C+ or has lost ten out of fifty points, simply a way of returning to the defensive posture of the split grade. If form obscures content, the entire paper suffers; how much each teacher must be free to determine for herself.

If you do want to give students specific help with their mechanics, they will learn most from your putting an X at the end of each line containing a mechanical error in the first few paragraphs or pages and (again) demanding revision

before you evaluate the paper for a grade. This graphically illustrates to the student her writing problems, and you can refer her to the Learning Assistance Center for help in correction and for further tutoring. Such responses give students what they need from you as a non-English teacher responding to their writing: a definition of their difficulty and an opportunity to improve.

5. WHEN YOU DO WRITE COMMENTS ON PAPERS, BE BRIEF.

We recommend that you try to confine your comment on each writing assignment to 25 words or less placed at the end of the paper, a comment that responds to the paper as a whole, praising its strengths (if possible) and making positive recommendations for improvement. Avoid comments whose intent is primarily defensive, an attempt to head off the student who might object to her grade. Far more effective and far less costly in time is handling those occasional complaints during an office hour. Also avoid hostile and combative comments, tolerable among equals, but chilling to even the most confident student. (The second-year piano student's execution is, of course, faulty, but the teacher needn't rub it in!) Briefly stated praise and constructive criticism usually give students all they need and want from you.

What might these short but effective comments look like? Take for example a history teacher grading a paper which was to rank in importance the causes of the Great Depression. The student has shown good recall of detail but is careless in spelling and other mechanics and has not ranked causes clearly. Here is a possible response:

> Excellent recall of detail. But what about its purpose--to help rank causes? Your careless mechanics suggest careless thinking. (19 words)

Occasional and very brief marginal comments along the way can identify strengths and weaknesses, but a point-by-point commentary can quickly degenerate into time-costly nagging--to which the student's natural response is "Just leave me alone!" Here are some comments that could help students:

> "This paragraph confuses me. What is its main idea?"

"I can't get from sentence to sentence here."

"Excellent connection between ideas."

"Careless errors make the idea hard to find."

"I can't read your handwriting. What am I missing?"

"Good examples of your point."

Or suppose a computer science teacher has asked students to write a paragraph comparing two articles debating the health risks of Video Display Terminals, and she grades a paper written with frequent misspellings and ignoring unwelcome evidence presented in one of the articles. She might respond:

> Your discussion of _____ is thorough, but you ignore _____, apparently because you disagree. Terrible spelling. You know what computers do with misspelled commands! (24 words)

Writing brief, incisive, and constructive comments demands practice, but it is repaid with savings of time, freedom to assign more and varied writing tasks, and students who, through writing, begin to gain control of ideas in your discipline.

CONCLUSION

All of our recommendations here are, of course, only that. Take them for the use you can make of them. We hope we have given teachers who assign writing regularly some ideas worth trying in creating writing assignments and handling papers. And we hope also to have shown that every teacher can experiment with writing, that such experiment benefits both teacher and student, and that it need not be dismissed out of hand as too costly in time and trouble. We stress the word experiment. Teachers can explore a variety of approaches to writing, shaping it in ways that work for them.

We have tried in this handbook to integrate two apparently antagonistic things: meaningful writing assignments for students and fast and responsible techniques

for handling the writing they do. We know that both must be possible for Writing Across the Curriculum to work. And our goal here is, not a pedagogical ideal, but something that works for teachers.

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In straightforward writing, Rawlins tells teachers what writing can do for learning in their disciplines and how it can be designed to draw more from students while draining less from teachers. This brief article and the four others presented here give the best practical advice we have seen.

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